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SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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SUBJECT: ECONOMIC CONTRACTION HOLLOWING OUT ZIMBABWEAN
POLICE

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

11. (C) As we have reported elsewhere, Zimbabwe's steep economic decline is beginning to be felt by the country's security forces, the main pillars of support for the increasingly authoritarian Mugabe regime. On October 18, Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri went public with complaints that the force's stagnating budget was affecting morale and efficiency and warned of the consequences for public order. Our contacts within the force confirmed that morale is at an historic low and that training needs are unmet. The majority of the police are now working under the official poverty line of Z\$9 million per month and many of the lower level officers have reverted to taking bribes to help pay for their day-to-day needs. Many other officers have already left the force or are actively looking for other employment. End Summary.

&Dangerous8 Underfunding

12. (C) Addressing the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Defense and Home Affairs October 18, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) Commissioner Augustine Chihuri said the ZRP was being &run down8 by lack of funding and that members of the ZRP were becoming disgruntled over poor salaries and working conditions. He complained that the ZRP was being allocated only Z\$1.7 trillion of the Z\$27 trillion that the force needed to operate. As an example of the effect of this underfunding, Chihuri noted that the ZRP required 260,000 liters of petrol per month to maintain normal operations, but was only allocated 20,000 liters, - enough for one precinct,8 according to the commissioner. Chihuri added that the ZRP also did not have the funding to properly outfit its employees or provide adequate training.

13. (C) Chihuri lashed out at the Ministry of Finance for being biased against members of the police force, noting that the security guards at the RBZ were better paid than the police. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that corruption was increasing as police officers needed to supplement their incomes just to feed their families. In a stark warning, Chihuri called the underfunding dangerous and said the country would &reap what it sowed8 if it continued.

Disastrous Effects on Police

14. (C) Rank and file police officers have related stories of growing poverty to RSO local investigators. According to these officers, morale in the ZRP has reached a historic low point due chiefly to wages that fall well below the official poverty level of Z\$9 million per month (roughly \$100 at the parallel market exchange rate). A police constable earns only Z\$2.5 million. Assistant Inspectors and Inspectors earn between Z\$4.5 million and Z\$5.7 million per month. With these salaries, officers are expected to pay ever-increasing prices for transportation, which now average Z\$500,000 per week, as well as to pay rent, which averages Z\$1 million per room per month. (N.B. The police officers have belatedly learned that by destroying nearly half of Zimbabwe's urban housing stock during Operation Murambatsvina they have driven up their own rents due to the laws of supply and demand.)

15. (C) Officers of all ranks have told our investigators that they are actively looking for other means of employment. The police force is now reportedly down to approximately 20,000 officers from a 25,000 to 30,000. Even officers who have been with the ZRP for 15 years and are nearing their pension age are considering leaving the force because their pension payouts will be miniscule. Those that are staying put say it is only because there are no other jobs available.

16. (C) Our contacts within the police have also confirmed Chihuri,s complaint that the ZRP is losing effectiveness. As a cost-saving measure, the ZRP reportedly cut training for new recruits. Moreover, other training costs are being passed on to individual officers. Firing range training, for instance, was said to be all but non-existent, since officers had to pay for it themselves. As a result of fuel and vehicle shortages, the police have been encouraged to use personal transport to arrive at accident scenes or to answer domestic calls. However, in many areas calls for police intervention simply go unanswered.

Comment

17. (C) Zimbabwe,s steep economic decline is beginning to impact the key pillars of Mugabe,s support) the security services. We have noted elsewhere the credible reports that the military is being downsized by two-third,s. The decline of the police may prove even more problematic for the regime since they are the first line of repression and have been responsible for the bulk of the official violence directed at the MDC and other regime opponents.
DELL